Forms of Alternative Treatment

Policy Number: 10.01.527  Last Review: 7/2018

Policy
Alternative treatment is considered a contract exclusion on most benefit plans.

Description of Procedure or Service
Alternative treatment consists of a group of diverse medical and health care systems, practices, and products that are not generally considered to be part of conventional medicine. While scientific evidence exists regarding some of these therapies, for most there are key questions that are yet to be answered through well-designed scientific studies – questions such as whether these therapies are safe and whether they work for the purposes for which they are used. Other terms used to describe such procedures include "holistic", "unconventional", and "complementary."

Alternative therapies are based on no common or consistent ideology, therapy of illness, or treatment. They derive from a variety of sources: ethnic and folk traditions, mainstream medical practices, established religions or semi-religious cults, philosophies or metaphysical movements, and health-and-wellness groups. The National Institutes of Health's Office of Alternative Medicine classified alternative therapies into the following seven categories:

- Diet and nutrition - use of specific foods, vitamins, and minerals to prevent illness and to treat disease
- Alternative systems of medical practice - use of medicine from another culture (e.g., Ayurvedia, Chinese medicine)
- Herbal medicine - use of plants as medicine
- Mind-body interventions - use of the mind to enhance health (e.g., hypnosis, meditation, yoga)
- Manual healing methods - use of the hands to promote healing (e.g., massage, chiropractic and osteopathic manipulation)
- Pharmacologic and biologic treatments - use of various substances (e.g., drugs, serums) to treat specific medical problems
- Bioelectromagnetic therapies - use of electrical currents or magnetic fields to promote healing (e.g., bone repair, electroacupuncture)

The efficacy of various alternative medicine regimens is generally unproven, and some alternative therapies have been shown to be ineffective or even harmful.
Examples of Alternative Therapies include, but are not limited to:
References:


126. Rolfing Institute of Structural Integration [website]. Available at: http://www.rolf.org/.


**Additional Policy Key Words**

N/A

**Policy Implementation/Update Information**

7/1/09  New policy.

4/1/10  Hypnosis added to the table of Forms of Alternative Treatment

7/1/10  Geothermal spa therapy added to the table of Forms of Alternative Treatment

7/1/11  Brain balance and Kinesio taping added to table of Forms of Alternative Treatment

7/1/12  Ion therapy added to the table.

7/1/13  No policy changes.

7/1/14  No policy changes.

7/1/15  No policy changes.

7/1/16  Added Astym® treatment to the table.

7/1/17  No policy statement changes.

7/1/18  No policy statement changes.

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